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C O N F I D E N T I A L CHIANG MAI 000107

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PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 7/17/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [BM](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: BURMA: FIGHTERS DEFECT TO KNU; OFFENSIVE UNLIKELY FOR NOW

REF: A. CHIANG MAI 94 (KNU REPORTS)
[1](#)B. CHIANG MAI 71 (ETHNIC ARMED GROUPS RETHINKING)
[1](#)C. CHIANG MAI 80 (FIGHTING WANING; DISPLACES)

CLASSIFIED BY: Alex Barrasso, Chief, Pol/Econ, CG Chiang Mai.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary and Comment

[1](#)1. (C) Contrary to what the Karen National Union (KNU -- an armed resistance group operating along the Thai-Burma border) reported last week, Thai authorities assert that a renewed offensive by the Burmese regime and its proxy -- the DKBA (Democratic Karen Buddhist Army) is unlikely in the immediate future. Our contacts also told us that nearly 100 DKBA soldiers have defected to the KNU since July 7.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: Thai and KNU contacts speculate that these defections may be the precursor to a larger-scale realignment of forces in Karen State. Contacts note that such defections could continue if the regime continues to rein in the DKBA and intensifies its efforts to incorporate it into a border guard force (Ref B). End Summary and Comment.

Offensive Unlikely for Now

[1](#)3. (C) Thai National Intelligence Agency and Royal Thai Army Intelligence contacts told us that the KNU's Seventh Brigade area is calm, and that Burma Army (BA) troops that supported the regime/DKBA offensive in the area in June (Ref C) have retreated to more inland positions. Currently, only small units of BA and DKBA troops remain, and neither side appears to be looking to pick a fight. Our contacts observed that the battle was now shifting from the military sphere to winning over the hearts and minds of the people. The KNU is slowly retaking areas it lost during the June fighting, but according to our contacts, is unlikely to directly confront the DKBA in open-field combat due to the fact that the KNU would be out-manned and out-gunned. Our contacts cited rugged, muddy terrain as another factor limiting offensive operations in the area. They also said they had no indication a regime-led offensive against the KNU in Karen State was imminent.

Defections

[1](#)4. (C) Meanwhile, both our Thai contacts and the KNU reported

that several DKBA soldiers defected to the KNU between July 7-12. Many brought weapons with them, though we have no further information on the types of armaments. According to Thai authorities, 94 defected in the five day period. Both the KNU and Thai military believe that more defections are likely.

15. (U) This cable has been coordinated with Embassy Rangoon.

ANDERSON